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FM AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3025
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 2825
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0407
RHMFIS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 2229
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 THE HAGUE 000418

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [AF](#) [NL](#)
SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/AFGHANISTAN: ENROUTE TO YES ON MOST
"ASKS" POST-2010

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Classified By: Political-Economic Counselor Andrew C. Mann for reasons
1.4 (b,d)

[11.](#) (U) This cable follows up on post's "Netherlands/Afghanistan: Getting to YES post-2010" (reftel C).
[12.](#) (S/NF) SUMMARY: The Dutch consensus-based political process for post-2010 commitments in Afghanistan remains on track for a Cabinet decision in the fall followed by a parliamentary review in late 2009 or early 2010. We understand Labor Party (PvdA) leader/Deputy PM/Finance Minister Wouter Bos is the only cabinet member not in agreement with the details of a continued role in Afghanistan. The Dutch consider this an internal decision;

overt lobbying will likely provoke greater resistance to our desired goal. Therefore, discreet, coordinated engagement is necessary to assist committed Dutch leaders in gaining consensus from Bos and later approval by Parliament. END SUMMARY.

The Stakes

¶3. (S/NF) Prime Minister Balkenende (Christian Democrats - CDA), Foreign Minister Verhagen (CDA) and Defense Minister van Middelkoop (Christian Union - CU) reportedly agree the Dutch should support most of the ""Afghanistan Asks"" (reftel E). Specifically they want to retain the Provisional Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Uruzgan with a force protection of up to 500 personnel, and provide F-16's, intelligence assets, airlift and attack helicopters, military trainers and mentors, police mentors, medical units, special operations forces, support for counter-narcotics initiatives, agricultural development, and increased support for governance and development programs. Bos, however, is highly skeptical and he has failed to tip his hand as to his actual position yet. We understand he may be supportive of most "asks" except the PRT and helicopter assets.

The Critical Player

¶4. (S/NF) Verhagen recently expressed great concern about the Labor Party and specifically Bos, who continues to balk at the Dutch presence in Afghanistan, particularly in Uruzgan post-2010. Privately, Verhagen stated the Labor Party could support ""staying in Afghanistan in some roles but not continue in Uruzgan." This contrasts with confidential comments from the Labor Party defense spokesperson, MP Angelien Eijsink, who favored continuing the PRT in Uruzgan because of the investments to date in time, effort, funds and lives. Additionally, she stated that as a member of NATO the Dutch have a commitment to remain a viable part of the mission. However, for the Labor Party to support continuing with the PRT in Uruzgan, she said there must be a clear understanding and commitment that the mission is solely dedicated to ""stabilization and reconstruction.""

¶5. (S/NF) The poor showing of the Labor Party in the June European Parliament elections (dropping from 23.7% of the vote in 2004 to 12%, its all time lowest vote percentage in any election) has put Bos under pressure from the rank and file supporters, who generally oppose the military mission in Afghanistan. His leadership of the party is questioned regularly in the press - Labor Party faithful complain Bos gave in on authorizing the purchase of a JSF test aircraft earlier this year even in this difficult economic environment and they are concerned the party leadership will support raising the retirement age in Cabinet deliberations this autumn. Still, as the party leader, he is key to the future of the Dutch engagement in Afghanistan beyond 2010.

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Engagement Strategy

¶6. (S/NF) Our outreach plan and talking points detailed in reftel C remain the basis for our engagement with the Dutch:

- We appreciate the long-standing and significant contribution in Afghanistan, specifically in Uruzgan, that the Dutch have made.
- The Dutch are a valued partner in NATO's efforts to address a common threat in a dangerous region.
- While it is an internal decision by the Dutch whether they will stay in Afghanistan, we hope they will continue with other NATO allies and other countries in ISAF as it implements its new strategy.
- We hope the Dutch will continue their stability and development efforts in Uruzgan to build upon the considerable Dutch achievements there.

¶7. (S/NF) Bos, as Finance Minister and party leader, does not deal directly with Afghanistan on a regular basis. Bos is extremely skeptical of any discussion on this subject by U.S. officials. He considers any discussion about post-2010 Afghanistan engagement to be an internal Dutch political

decision. Reportedly, Bos ""was not surprised"" but ""not pleased"" when Afghanistan was brought up in his June 29 meeting with Secretary Geithner. He argued the Netherlands was a small country which had already been doing its fair share in Afghanistan. He also suggested other, bigger countries were not pulling their weight.

¶8. (S/NF) Success in getting the Dutch to keep their PRT in Uruzgan will hinge upon the Labor Party's recognition that the Uruzgan mission is developmental in nature and sustained commitment is needed to ensure the success of their peacebuilding and development investments there. The Labor Party could also be influenced by how much other countries are ""stepping up to the plate"" in support of ISAF's new strategy.

¶9. (SBU) The Cabinet has started its summer break, until mid-August. When it returns, it will focus on the budget which must be agreed on and presented to Parliament by September 15 (Prinsjesdag). Since Bos is Finance Minister, he will be pre-occupied until then.

¶10. (S/NF) MFA Deputy Director General Robert de Groot discussed a plan with POLMILOFF on July 2 for engaging Bos in forums considered to be ""inclusive"" - to avoid the appearance of outside pressure. He suggested a cascade of visits/forums/meetings involving USNATO Ambassador Daalder, SRAP Ambassador Holbrooke, and perhaps UN Special Representative Kai Eide. Obviously, we will take our cue from the discussions PM Balkenende has with the President in Washington July 14. After that, we suggest using the courtesy call on Bos by the new U.S. Ambassador to the Netherlands (whenever confirmed and credentials presented) to find out what his concerns are, with an offer to put Bos in contact with those senior U.S. officials who can respond to them. We anticipate having USNATO Ambassador Daalder give a public address on the new NATO strategy in Afghanistan in the autumn. General Petraeus, CENTCOM Commander, is planning to visit the Netherlands in mid/late September to participate in commemoration activities for WW II 65th anniversary liberation events. We hope to have him speak to a small group of parliamentarians, if his schedule permits. Likely at the invitation of FM Verhagen or Development Cooperation Minister Koenders (both of whom he has met), SRAP Ambassador Holbrooke could then follow up with a visit and talk effectively about the new strategy, the importance of Dutch 3D efforts in Uruzgan and the contributions other countries are making.

¶11. (S/NF) We continue to be on the lookout for opportunities to engage with decision makers locally as well as having Washington leaders meet with senior Dutch officials.

Furthermore, we continue to engage other members of the Labor Party who may be able to exert influence on Bos in the run-up to the cabinet decision. Development Cooperation Minister

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Koenders, Defense Spokesperson Eijsink, Floor Leader Mariette Hammer, and Foreign Affairs Spokesperson MP Martijn van Dam to name a few. It will take teamwork and coordinated engagement with the Dutch at all levels to ultimately obtain their commitment post-2010.

FOSTER